

TRYING TO OUTFRIN THE PROPHECY

He still recalls her ancient eyes that augered
him beneath her hood of carcajou.
Her white teeth poked through every syllable,
pronounced in Inuit, then English so
he couldn't fail to comprehend her words:

"Whoever takes and goes must then return,
restore, and face the purifying cold."
He heard it often through the busy years,
sang whisky lyrics from the local lore
at tables where his kind compared success.

He challenged native legends, raided fields
at compass point, unearthed Alaskan secrets,
gouged out riches from the Great White Land.
Then headed south, a profiteer withdrawn
to self, retired to roses in his garden.

Unseasonal attacks of chill and rain
began to plague his recent days and nights.
Today his weather radio predicts
severe T-storms are headed for his Eden.
He rushes out to stake his cherished blossoms.

He knows the churning air has gathered miles
of driven dust and stinging Katmai pumice.
Old promises pursue him, wailing wolfwinds
echo myths, the crone. He tastes the silt,
the Bering salt, the waiting North's impatience.

He smells the dying salmon, wet fox fur,
the musk of oxen. Hears bald eagles screech,
two mating pairs in flight, their talons locked,
soaring, stalling just below the thunder.
The hybrid rose trees on his lawn bow down.

He sees but cannot hear them break. He knows
this cyclone, banked off granite, tundra, taiga,
rolls its eye at him. It roughed the backs
of auks and arctic terns to reach its goal.
And he, no random target, cannot hide

from furies sent down from the pole. He breathes
the oily smoke of Athabaskan cookfires.
His lungs expand on breath of rutting moose.
He hears the cries of Tlingit fishermen,
old grizzlies, falling spruce. He knows that he

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has not escaped to count and thump his barrels,
rattle nuggets in his calloused palm.
Inventive elements revise the ledger.
He tries to shield his roses; quantum chaos
gears to bind him to the augury.

The deconstruction force is more than vengeance;
pollen, dander, hair of baby seals
impose their will for what must fail and fall
before renascence. Storms converge their sweep,
an ancient narwhal arrowheads the gale,

becomes a swooping raptor. Manifested
omens nail him to his garden gate,
he feels the shuddered ground give way; the green
succumbs to permafrost. No man eludes
the source, no distance offers amnesty.

He must go back, as caribou return,
born magnetized, as glaciers crack and groan
atonement for abundance. Now he knows
no action but acceptance will appease
this gyring retribution howling triumph.

His hand, grown numb, relinquishes his roses.